

ordinary skill understands that the negative values of the pressure merely indicate pressure values that are below the commonly understood standard pressure.

In view of the above, withdrawal of the rejection of claim 9 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph is respectfully requested.

II. Office Action Objection to the Specification

The Office Action objects to the specification, asserting that the specification contains references to a negative pressure. This objection is respectfully traversed. As discussed above, one of ordinary skill understands that the negative values of the pressure merely indicate pressure values that are below the commonly understood standard pressure.

In view of the above, withdrawal of the objection to the specification is respectfully requested.

III. Prior Art Rejections

The Office Action rejects 1-3, 6 and 8 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0180119 to Kumazawa in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2003/0041574 to Noguchi; rejects claims 1-4 and 6-8 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Kumazawa in view of Noguchi and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,087,278 to Suzuki; and rejects claim 5 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Kumazawa in view of Noguchi and Suzuki and further in view of U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2004/0053050 to Guerfi. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

The present application focuses on the behavior in kneading step; however, the cited references focus on the size and shape of starting particles in the raw material. The technical concept of the cited references is irrelevant to that of the present application.

In Kumazawa, spherical agglomerated particles can be obtained by virtue of spray drying; however, those agglomerated particles turn into dispersed particles due to the kneading. Thus, the intended circularity of particles can not be retained.

One feature recited in claim 1 is that the pore-forming agent includes hollow particles (microcapsules). The Office Action admits that Kumazawa does not disclose this feature. However, the Office Action asserts that Noguchi discloses such feature at paragraph [0058], thus curing the deficiencies of Kumazawa.

Noguchi discloses the use of acrylic microcapsule of Examples 11 to 13, as is shown in Table 1 as a pore-forming agent. In addition, the fused silica as one of corderite-forming raw materials is used in Examples 1, 7 and 8. In this respect, the fused silica is manufactured by pulverizing the molten silica ingot. Thus, the fused silica can not be spherical and is corresponding to the crushed silica used in the Comparative Examples 1 to 3 of the present application.

Therefore, even if one combines teachings of Kumazawa with those of Noguchi, the effect of preventing the defects of microcapsule for providing the benefits as a pore forming agent in the present application can not be attained.

For at least the above reasons, Noguchi does not cure the deficiencies of Kumazawa.

Also, Suzuki and Guerfi do not supply the subject matter lacking in Kumazawa and Noguchi. For example, Suzuki discloses the use of spherical particles finely pulverized by means of a jet mill. Suzuki aims to obtaining a filter with its interparticle pores in the range of 0.1 to 2.0 μm in diameter with porosity of 35 to 40%. The person skilled in the art would not have referred to Suzuki to obtain a honeycomb structure having high porosity and thermal strength due to using a small amount of microcapsule.

In view of the above, the applied references, either individually or in combination, do not disclose or render obvious the subject matter recited in claim 1, and claims 2-8 depending therefrom. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1-8 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) is respectfully requested.

IV. Claim 9 Contains Allowable Subject Matter

Claim 9 is patentable at least in view of the patentability of claim 1, from which it depends, as well as for additional features it recites. In particular, the applied references do not disclose or render obvious the reduced pressure recited in claim 9. In fact, the Office Action does not reject claim 9 over the applied references. Thus, claim 9 should be allowed together with claims 1-8.

V. Non-Elected Claims 10-12

Non-elected claims 10-12 recite the hollow particles recited in claim 1. Thus, rejoinder and allowance of claims 10-12 are respectfully requested.

VI. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims 1-12 are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



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